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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Special Committee on Preferences
Nineteenth session
Geneva, 18 May 1992
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Provisional agenda and annotations to the provisional agenda

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

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II. ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Introduction

By its resolution 77 (III), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development decided to establish the Special Committee on Preferences as a permanent mechanism within UNCTAD. Its terms of reference are described in section VIII of the agreed conclusions adopted by the Special Committee at its fourth session. Accordingly, at its nineteenth session the Committee will, inter alia, carry out the periodic review of the generalized system of preferences.

The nineteenth session of the Special Committee will be held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 18 to 26 May 1992.

Item 1: Election of officers

At its fifth session, the Committee decided to apply the seven-session cycle of rotation (like that annexed to the rules of procedure of the Committee on Manufactures) and to elect a Chairman and a Rapporteur for that session in accordance with the second year of the cycle. It agreed that the election of the Chairmen and Rapporteurs who had held office during the period before its change of status (i.e. during the first four sessions) would be considered as being in application of the first year of the cycle. 1/

Accordingly, the nineteenth session corresponds to the second session of a seven-session cycle, and the Chairman of the nineteenth session will be elected from among the representatives of countries members of Group B, while the Rapporteur will be selected from among the representatives of countries members of Group C.

The Committee will complete its Bureau by electing five Vice-Chairmen, in accordance with rule 19 of the rules of procedure of the Main Committees 2/ (i.e. one from Group B, one from Group D and three from Groups A and C combined).

Item 2: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

The provisional agenda for the nineteenth session of the Special Committee on Preferences was adopted by the Special Committee on Preferences at its 171st plenary meeting on 17 May 1991.

In its decision 179 (XVIII) of 17 September 1978, the Board stipulated that the annual sessions of the Special Committee on Preferences should be conducted according to the following procedure:

"1. The plenary meetings of the Special Committee on Preferences should be devoted primarily to issues of a general character concerning the generalized system of preferences.

"2. During the sessions of the Special Committee on Preferences, informal plurilateral consultations should be held on individual schemes, if so requested, between preference-receiving countries, on the one hand, and the preference-giving country on the other. These plurilateral consultations would be private and confidential in character."

In his note of 6 March 1992, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD invited States members which were interested in holding plurilateral consultations to advise the secretariat well in advance of the nineteenth session of the Special Committee so that the necessary arrangements could be made for holding such consultations. The secretariat will in due course inform States members concerned of requests received and of consequent arrangements for consultations.

As noted in the annotation to item 4, that item is to be considered in a sessional committee. It is suggested that, in accordance with usual practice, the sessional committee elect a chairman and a vice-chairman-cum-rapporteur.

Item 3: Review of the implementation, maintenance, improvement and utilization of the generalized system of preferences

The Special Committee will have before it the "Fifteenth general report on the implementation of the generalized system of preferences" (TD/B/C.5/142). Chapter I highlights the changes and improvements that have taken place in the various schemes since the eighteenth session of the Special Committee on Preferences. Chapter II updates the trade effects of the system to cover the most recent period for which information is available. Also relevant to this agenda item are the replies received from preference-giving countries on the operation and effects of the various schemes (TD/B/C.5/PREF/44 to 48), as well as notes by the UNCTAD secretariat providing the latest information on the operation and effects of the EEC scheme 1991 (TD/B/C.5/EEC/16) and the scheme of Japan (TD/B/C.5/JAPAN/15).

Item 4: Consultations on harmonization and improvement of the rules of origin

In its resolution 352 (XXXIV), the Trade and Development Board endorsed the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Working Group on the In-Depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields, whereby the Working Group on Rules of Origin was converted into a sessional committee of the Special Committee on Preferences. 3/ Accordingly, this agenda item will be considered by a sessional committee to be established. The secretariat has prepared a report entitled "Examination of definitions of 'substantial transformation' and implications of harmonization: possible initiatives in regard to simplification and liberalization" (TD/B/C.5/141), in order to assist the sessional committee in its tasks of identifying and promoting the adoption of initiatives relating to the harmonization, simplification and liberalization of the GSP rules of origin, in response to Conference resolution 159 (VI). In its agreed conclusions 12 (XVII), the Committee decided to carry forward deliberations on this item to a future session of the Special Committee on Preferences. Accordingly, the sessional committee will also have before it the report prepared for the seventeenth session of the Special Committee on Preferences entitled "Improvements in the rules of origin, including harmonization: identification and promotion of possible initiatives" (TD/B/C.5/120).

Item 5: Technical assistance in connection with the generalized system of preferences

The Special Committee will have before it a report on "Technical cooperation activities on the generalized system of preferences and other trade laws, 1991" (TD/B/C.5/143). The report underscores the importance of these activities and addresses the financial viability of the Geneva-based programme of technical cooperation on the GSP.

Item 6: Provisional agenda for the twentieth session of the Special Committee on Preferences

In accordance with rule 8 of the rules of procedures of the Main Committees (by which the Special Committee is guided), during the session the secretariat will submit a draft provisional agenda for the twentieth session of the Committee.

Item 8: Adoption of the report of the Special Committee on Preferences to the Trade and Development Board

The Board will consider the report of the Special Committee during the first part of its thirty-ninth session, scheduled to be held from 28 September to 9 October 1992.

The attention of the Committee is drawn to paragraph 6 of decision 302 (XXIX) adopted by the Board on 21 September 1984, whereby the Board instructed its Main Committees and other subsidiary bodies to ensure that their reports were concise, action-oriented and not exceeding the limit of 32 pages.

The Committee may wish to invite the Rapporteur, in cooperation with delegations and the secretariat, to make every possible effort to conform to this decision of the Board.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Trade and Development Board, thirteenth session, Supplement No. 3 (TD/B/442), paras. 230-232.

2/ At its fifth session the Committee decided to continue being guided, as appropriate, by the rules of procedure of the Committee on Manufactures (ibid., para. 230), which have since been incorporated into a consolidated set of rules of procedure of the Main Committees of the Board (TD/B/740).

3/ TD/B/1154.